

It's Kermis Time on Door County Peninsula

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If "Simple Simon" went looking for a pieman at a Kermis instead of at "The Fair," he would be "Smart Simon," if he looked up some of the housewives in the Belgian settlement on the Door County peninsula. Since the last weekend in August when the Kermises began, the women in that section of the state have been making Belgian pies, not only by the dozens but by the hundreds. Belgians pies, which are quite different from pies made of pastry, are the special treat at these festivals.

Kermises, which are Thanksgiving celebrations, have been observed in Belgium since the 14th century. Belgians that emigrated to American and settled in Brown, Door and Kewaunee counties, brought the tradition with them.

On the peninsula that extends from Green Bay north to Sturgeon Bay are the towns and hamlets that these pioneers built after they had turned a forest wilderness into prosperous farmlands. The compactness of the neighborhood helped to strengthen kindred ties, keeping alive the customs and traditions of the mother country.

The pattern of the Kermis, as celebrated in Belgium for centuries, was started in the

new land. Taking place for seven consecutive Sundays beginning with the last Sunday in August, the celebrations were in different towns every weekend so that the folks from each community would be able to attend the Kermises in all the other towns.

Begins at Mass

As in Belgium, the Kermis or Kirk-Messe (Church-Mass), began with a Mass of Thanksgiving. This was followed by eating and merrymaking in the church yard. Tables were piled high with food, and games and dancing often continued for two or three days.

Festivities began with the Dance of the Dust, so called because it was performed in the roadway. (The crops for which they were giving thanks came from the earth.) Games included archery contests, climbing a greased pole and chasing a greased pig. Foot races were popular as was horse racing when the Belgians were prosperous enough to buy the animals.

During the war, Kermises like many other forms of entertainment were discontinued. When revived, the activities were transferred from the church grounds to homes and town halls.

Today they are kept alive by the "old timers" and the tavern keepers, especially those who have space for

dancing and an adjoining dining space to serve meals.

In many of the homes there is still a Thanksgiving feast when the young folks and relatives come home. It is also a time for visiting. Guests go from house to house renewing friendships. The piece de resistance that is always served in both homes and public places is Belgian Pie.

This pie, which is always free — even in the taverns, is served with beer and eaten with the fingers. Made with a bread dough, the pie is usually filled with dried fruits, apples or rice and topped with cottage cheese.

Leo Bero who heads the American Belgian Club said his mother made as many as 500 Belgian pies. Women in the area today try to out do each other baking the most delicious of all pies.

Mrs. Jean Guth baked 120 pies to be served in her husband's tavern for the Kermis in Brussels the first week in September. Mrs. Mamie Chaudiour and her daughter made them by the dozens. And the women are still mixing and rolling the dough in their kitchens in these Belgian settlements.

Though cooks are rather cagey about their special recipes, Mrs. Guth was gracious enough to part with hers. Here is how she makes Belgian Pie.

Crust for 12 Pies

Dissolve $\frac{1}{4}$ cake Fleischmann's yeast in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup lukewarm water with 1 tablespoon sugar. Let stand until bubbly. Beat six whole eggs with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar and 1 teaspoon salt. Add one cup cream (scalded and slightly cooled) and 1 cup butter softened to room temperature. (Never melt the butter.) Add yeast mixture and gradually blend in 5 cups flour. If the dough is soft, add more flour to handle. Divide into 12 balls and let stand for five minutes. Roll out to fit pie tins that have been greased with lard.

Filling

For prune pie — enough for 4 pies

Mrs. Mamie Chaudiour and her daughter prepare Belgian pies to be served dozens.

Cook one pound of prunes until soft and put through food chopper. Add sugar to taste and spread on the crust.

Same method is used with other dried fruits or with fresh apples.

Raisin Filling—for 4 pies

Cook a pound of raisins until soft, drain and add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sweet cream, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar and 1 tablespoon flour. Mix and cook until mixture begins to thicken. Spread on crusts.

Rice Filling—for 4 pies

1 cup rice (Mrs. Guth

uses a quick-cooking rice) Wash until water runs clear. Cook in 2 cups of water and $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. salt. Bring to a boil and then simmer until rice is soft. Use a heavy kettle as rice should not be stirred while cooking. Add $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups milk and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cream. Bring to a boil and add two egg yolks (well beaten) and $\frac{2}{3}$ cups sugar. Cook until slightly thick. Add 1 teaspoon vanilla.

Cheese Topping for pies

For 12 pies —

2 pounds dry cottage cheese and 2 pounds creamed cottage cheese. Put

through food chopper or strainer. Add $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups sugar and 1 teaspoon salt. Beat six egg yolks and add to cheese. If necessary add a little cream to make it spread easily. Cover the fruit on the pies and bake at 350-degrees from 12 to 15 minutes, or until crust is golden brown. Most ovens can take six pies at a time but it is desirable to rotate them from top to bottom shelves so they brown evenly. Whipped cream is sometimes used on the rice and apple pies.

